

*Taking Refuge under His Wings: Ruth 2*  
Ben Reaoch, Three Rivers Grace Church  
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This morning we continue our study through the book of Ruth in the Old Testament. This little book contains an amazing story of God's providence over all things, and His plan to use even severe trials for the good of His people and to the glory of His Name. Last week we saw in Ruth 1 a frowning providence that met Naomi and Ruth. Elimelech and Naomi, and their two sons, left Bethlehem because of the famine and moved to Moab. In Moab Elimelech died, the two sons married Moabite women, the sons died, and Naomi was left without a husband, without sons, and without any grandchildren. This was a frowning providence, and the frown of God was all that Naomi could see in the midst of it. She was not trusting that "behind a frowning providence, He hides a smiling face," in the words of William Cowper's hymn. She tried to dissuade Ruth and Orpah from following her back to Bethlehem by saying in 1:13, "No, my daughters, for it is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me."

But in spite of Naomi's repeated attempts to convince Ruth to return to Moab, Ruth was irresistibly drawn to Naomi and Naomi's people and Naomi's God—Yahweh. She had every reason, humanly-speaking, to heed Naomi's advice and head for home. But God had put in her heart a compelling desire to go with Naomi to Israel and to worship the God of Israel. God was at work in the midst of this frowning providence, and we need to believe that God is at work in the midst of our trials as well. God works all of these things together for good, as we see in this story. Ruth, the Moabite woman, became the great-grandmother of King David, and thus part of the genealogy of Jesus Christ! What an amazing story of God using heartache and loss and severe trials as part of His plan to bless His people and glorify His Name. Be encouraged by this, brothers and sisters. Apply this to your own situation right now, whatever trials you are facing. God is not absent. He has ordained these trials. He is sovereign over all things. And He is not only sovereign, He is also good. He has not ordained these trials in your life because He is against you, as Naomi thought. He has a good purpose in the trials that He ordains for us. And we may not always understand His purpose, especially when we're still in middle of the hardship. We may only see the frowning providence, and not be able to see or understand how there could be a smiling face, but we must trust that it's true. We see it in the story of Ruth. We see it throughout the Bible. And we have experienced it in our lives as well, if we have the eyes to see it.

So the story begins in chapter 1 with a frowning providence. The only good news is that the famine has ended, and that Ruth is determined to accompany Naomi back to Bethlehem. But chapter 2 opens with a bright ray of hope.

Last week in chapter 1 we focused on the providence of God, which we'll continue to notice in this chapter as well. And then we looked also at the nature of faith as it was portrayed in Ruth's words to Naomi. This morning I want us to see the kindness of God—the undeserved kindness that God shows toward Ruth through this man, Boaz. And then, again, I want us to observe some things about the nature of faith in the way that Ruth responds to Boaz.

### **The Kindness of God**

Verse 1 is like a bright ray of sunlight shining through some very dark clouds. “Now Naomi had a relative of her husband's, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz.” The narrator jumps ahead of the story a little bit to give us this information. It's not until the end of the chapter that Naomi remembers that Boaz is a relative and a redeemer, and shares that news with Ruth. But here at the beginning of the chapter the narrator already clues us in to what God is doing. God's providence is guiding every detail of this story. Remember that in the last chapter Naomi had no hope of Ruth finding a husband in Israel. She thought the only possibility was if Naomi, herself, had other sons. But she had forgotten about Boaz! She had forgotten about this relative of Elimelech's who was also “a worthy man.” This wasn't just any relative who could fulfill the expectations of levirate marriage for Ruth's deceased husband. This was a worthy man, and a wealthy landowner. Now, as we're going to see, God leads Ruth right into Boaz's field.

In verse 2 we see something of Ruth's character. She is a hard worker, and determined to help her mother-in-law. She says, “Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after him in whose sight I shall find favor.” First, somewhat as an aside, notice Ruth's work ethic. This is not the main point of the story, but it's something I think we should notice. Ruth took the initiative to go find work. She felt the responsibility to provide for herself and her mother-in-law. And so she worked hard in the field. In verse 7 Boaz's worker tells him that Ruth “has continued from early morning until now, except for a short rest.” This should be an example for us and should spur us on in whatever work God has given us to do. Whether you're working for an employer or working in the home—or if you've lost your job and you can't find anyone to pay you for your work, there is still useful work for you to do. Paul warns against idleness in 1 Thessalonians 3. He

writes, “If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living” (vv. 10-12). So let’s all follow Ruth’s example and take the initiative to work, and to work hard, in whatever useful activity God gives us to do.

Secondly, we already notice here Ruth’s humility and gratefulness. She sets out to glean “after him in whose sight I shall find favor” (v. 2). She knows that she is a foreigner and that she is poor, and therefore she knows she is dependent upon the charity of others. She’s aware of Israel’s provision for the poor and foreigners, that they can come and glean the “leftovers” in the fields. In Leviticus 19:9-10 it says, “When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the Lord your God.” Ruth was both poor and a sojourner, and she was grateful for this provision in Israel’s law. And so she humbly went to work in the field, hoping to find favor in the sight of some landowner.

I love the wording of verse 3. “So she set out and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers, *and she happened to come* to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the clan of Elimelech.” She just happened to walk into Boaz’s field! This worthy man of the clan of Elimelech, one of Naomi’s relatives by her husband. Ruth just happened to find herself in his field. Well, what does this communicate to us in a subtle but profound way? It communicates again the providence of God. There’s intentional irony in these words. It’s worded in a way that would suggest that this happened by chance, but in the context of the story we know that it was anything but chance. It was the providence of God. It was not a coincidence that Ruth ended up on Boaz’s field. This was exactly God’s design, which reinforces what we saw last week, that God is sovereign even over the human will. Ruth decided to go glean in a field. She decided on a particular field. She decided to turn this way, and then that way, and it was all exactly by God’s design. She ended up in the part of the field belonging to Boaz.

Can you look back on blessings that have come into your life and see God’s sovereign hand in all the details? Maybe friends would look at the situation and say, What a coincidence! What luck! But you know that it was God’s design and God’s kindness that caused those events.

Well, Ruth is now in Boaz's field. And then verse 4 tells us, "And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem." God has brought Ruth to the field, and now He is bringing Boaz to the field. We begin to learn more about this man Boaz, and we see that he is a man of God. He greets the workers in his field by saying, "The Lord be with you!" And they answer him, "The Lord bless you." And as the chapter continues it becomes clear that these are not mere words for Boaz. He is a man of God who experiences God's kindness in his own life and also extends that kindness to others.

He inquires about this young woman in the field. His servant tells him in verse 6, "She is the young Moabite woman, who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. She said, 'Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves after the reapers.' So she came, and she has continued from early morning until now, except for a short rest."

The conversation between Boaz and Ruth in verses 8-15 is where we see the amazing kindness of God in Boaz's kindness to Ruth. Look at what Boaz says to Ruth in verses 8-9, "Now, listen, my daughter, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close to my young women. Let your eyes be on the field that they are reaping, and go after them. Have I not charged the young men not to touch you? And when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink what the young men have drawn." Boaz is going far above and beyond the call of duty. The law mentioned letting the poor and the sojourner glean in your field, but Boaz is showing many additional kindnesses to Ruth. He tells her to continue gleaning in his field, and he encourages her to keep close to the young women who are working for him. She is to follow right along with them as they reap. And Boaz had also commanded his young men not to touch her. Ruth was very vulnerable, being a widow from a foreign land, trying to glean in this field. But Boaz uses his position of power to protect Ruth. And then beyond that he even provides water for her. He says, "when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink what the young men have drawn." This is especially remarkable considering the fact that in that day it was the custom that foreigners drew water for Israelites, and women typically drew water for the men. But if Ruth had to draw water for the workers, or even for herself, she would lose valuable time gleaning. So the offer of water is another tremendous kindness that Boaz shows toward Ruth.

Then look in verse 14 and see that Boaz also provided a meal for Ruth. We picture Ruth, the foreigner, sitting at a distance while Boaz and his workers begin to eat their lunch. But Boaz says, "Come here and eat some bread and dip your morsel in the wine." And then also "he passed to her roasted grain. And she ate until she was satisfied, and she had some left over." In verses 15-

16 Boaz tells his workers, “Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not reproach her. And also pull out some from the bundles for her and leave it for her to glean, and do not rebuke her.” This is another remarkable demonstration of kindness. The law was to let the gleaners come and get the leftovers after the reapers were finished. But Boaz is allowing Ruth to glean among the sheaves, and the workers are even told to pull some out of the bundles and leave them for Ruth. This is unheard of.

Boaz’s kindness is overflowing toward Ruth. Imagine what was going on in Ruth’s mind and heart in the midst of this. She headed out that morning, simply hoping to glean some ears of grain for her and her mother-in-law. And she is met with unexpected and abundant kindness.

In light of this, consider God’s kindness toward us. Each of us, like Ruth, is poor and needy. We deserve nothing, and yet God has unexpectedly and abundantly poured out His kindness upon us. He has given us far beyond anything we could ask or imagine. His loving-kindness has abounded to us in Christ. Listen to these verses from Ephesians 2:4-9, “But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show *the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness* toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” Even though we were dead in our trespasses, God chose to save us. And it is all a work of His grace. We deserve hell as the just punishment for our sin. But instead of giving us what we deserve (instead of punishing us as we deserve), God graciously gives us what we do not deserve. In the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, our sin has been dealt with, so that we can be saved and spend eternity beholding “the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” This is the most precious kindness we will ever encounter. The kindness of God Almighty who forgives sin and grants eternal life to all who will trust in Jesus Christ—to all who will take refuge under His wings.

As a point of application, we must also realize that God’s kindness toward us should translate into us showing kindness toward others. Later in the letter of Ephesians, which I just quoted, Paul also writes, “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you” (4:32). I’ve been focusing on Boaz as a picture of God’s kindness toward us, and we should also see him as an example of how we should be kind to others. The fact that God has been so kind to us motivates us to be

kind to one another—to our brothers and sisters in the church, to our family members, to our co-workers, to our neighbors, and as Boaz did, to the poor and the needy stranger. By God’s grace, it becomes our delight to emulate His kindness to us by being kind to others—by helping those who do not deserve it and cannot give anything in return. That’s what God has done for us, and what we should do for others.

So we see in this chapter the kindness of God. We see God’s kindness to Ruth, manifest through Boaz’s kindness. And we see in this a picture of God’s kindness toward us in Christ. We who are poor and needy and undeserving, He has chosen to bless richly.

### **The Nature of Faith**

Let’s come back now and look at verses 10-13 in Ruth 2, and here we’ll see another aspect of faith. In chapter 1 Ruth’s determined desire to go with Naomi is evidence of God’s sovereign work in her heart to draw her to Himself. And this is what God has done in our hearts as well. God creates faith in us, and puts the desire in our hearts to seek Him and love Him and follow Him. Here in chapter 2 we’ll learn another lesson about faith, namely that God delights in blessing those who seek their refuge in Him. Look at Ruth’s response to Boaz’s kindness, because this should characterize our response to God’s kindness. It says in verse 10, “Then she fell on her face, bowing to the ground, and said to him, ‘Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?’” Ruth was utterly amazed by the kindness of this man? And I want to ask us this morning, Are we amazed at the kindness of God? Are we amazed by grace? Are we thankful for God’s many kindnesses in our lives? Unfortunately, it’s our nature to be unthankful. It’s our nature to expect kindness, rather than fall on our faces and be amazed by it. Ruth asks, “Why have I found favor in your eyes?” She is astonished. This is what she had hoped for, as she said to Naomi back in verse 2. She was hoping to glean “after him in whose sight I shall find favor.” And now God has providentially led her to Boaz, who is showing her tremendous favor. And Ruth is profoundly grateful.

Boaz answers her in verses 11-12, “All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told to me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. The Lord repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!” Boaz had heard the whole story of Naomi and Ruth, and in some detail it seems. He is impressed by Ruth’s

kindness to Naomi, and he is impressed by the fact that Ruth left her parents and her homeland in order to come to Israel. He says a prayer of blessing for Ruth, asking the Lord to repay her for what she has done and for a full reward to be given to her. His desire is that Ruth would be blessed by the Lord after she has experienced such loss and has given up so much. Interestingly, Boaz himself will be God's answer to this prayer.

Lest you think of this as Ruth earning God's reward by her good works—lest you think of the “repayment” and “reward” as something that Ruth earns from God—notice the last phrase, “under whose wings you have come to take refuge!” Ruth has not come to work for Yahweh in an attempt to earn a reward from him. She has come to take refuge under His wings. This is faith—coming to God, not to give, but to receive. Not to offer our strength and effort, but to experience His strength, to come under His protection and care. Ruth's actions and attitude is a great picture of saving faith. She is willing to risk much. She is willing to give up the comfort of family and home. But it's because she sees that Yahweh is a far greater refuge than any earthly refuge.

And what a beautiful image this is of God's care for His children—the helpless baby bird coming under the protective wings of its mother. Psalm 57:1 says, “Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me, for in you my soul takes refuge; in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge, till the storms of destruction pass by.” That should be our cry to God. We plead for mercy and take refuge in the shadow of His wings. And it's God's desire to be this refuge for us. In Matthew 23 Jesus laments over Jerusalem, saying, “How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!” (v. 37). This is our Lord's desire—to be our refuge. It is by His design that we come to Him desperate and needy, seeking His care, for this magnifies His glory. This shows Him to be the All-Powerful, All-Sufficient One. And thus God's design of salvation by faith alone is such that we receive what we so desperately need and want, and God gets all the credit that is due Him because He is the One doing the work—He's the One providing protection for us. This is what is being shown in Ruth's life. She willingly and eagerly leaves her family and her homeland and takes refuge under the wings of Yahweh. And in this way Ruth is the recipient of God's kindness, and God is shown to be great.

This chapter concludes with Ruth returning home to present the fruit of her day's labor, which is much larger than either she or Naomi expected. Naomi says in verse 19, “Where did you glean today? And where have you worked? Blessed be the man who took notice of you.” Naomi marveled at the amount of food they had received. But this blessing could not even compare to what

she was about to hear from the lips of Ruth. “The man’s name with whom I worked today is Boaz.” Ruth didn’t even know the significance of what she was saying. But for Naomi it was as if her whole world was turning right-side-up again. Boaz! Of course. How could I have forgotten Boaz. In verse 20 she exclaims, “May he be blessed by the Lord, whose kindness (*hesed*) has not forsaken the living (meaning Ruth and Naomi) or the dead (meaning Elimelech, Mahlon, and Chilion)!” There’s ambiguity here as to whether the kindness refers to that of Boaz or the Lord. Is Naomi speaking of Boaz’s kindness to her family, or the Lord’s kindness to the family? The ambiguity could be intentional so that it’s a reference to both Boaz and the Lord. If it’s not both, I think it’s probably the Lord’s kindness that’s in view (cf. Genesis 24:27). Naomi is praising the Lord for this kindness. She realizes now that He has not forsaken them.

In Ruth 1:8 Naomi had said to her daughters-in-law, “May the Lord deal kindly with you,” and what she had in mind was the two of them returning to Moab and finding Moabite husbands. But now she realizes that a far greater kindness could be on the horizon. Naomi’s next statement reveals to Ruth what the narrator has already told us at the beginning of the chapter. “The man is a close relative of ours, one of our redeemers.” We’ll learn more of what this means in the next two chapters, but it’s clear that Naomi is thinking of Boaz as a potential husband for Ruth.

What an amazing providence! Naomi had felt that God was against her, but now she is beginning to see God’s goodness and kindness. Behind the frowning providence she can now see God’s smiling face. God was in control of the famine, the move to Moab, and the deaths of Elimelech and Mahlon and Chilion. God was in control of the fact that Ruth and Orpah had been barren. He was in control of Ruth’s desires, giving her the desire to accompany Naomi back to Bethlehem. And God was also in control of Boaz’s life, preserving him for Ruth. And God was in control of Ruth’s steps, leading her into Boaz’s field.

May this story remind us of God’s kindness toward us, and may our response to God’s kindness be like Ruth’s response in this chapter. May we be amazed at His mercy and compassion and forgiveness, and may we glorify Him by seeking refuge under His wings.